

# ART IN AMERICA

AND ELSEWHERE

VOLUME XVI · NUMBER 5 · AUGUST MCMXXVIII

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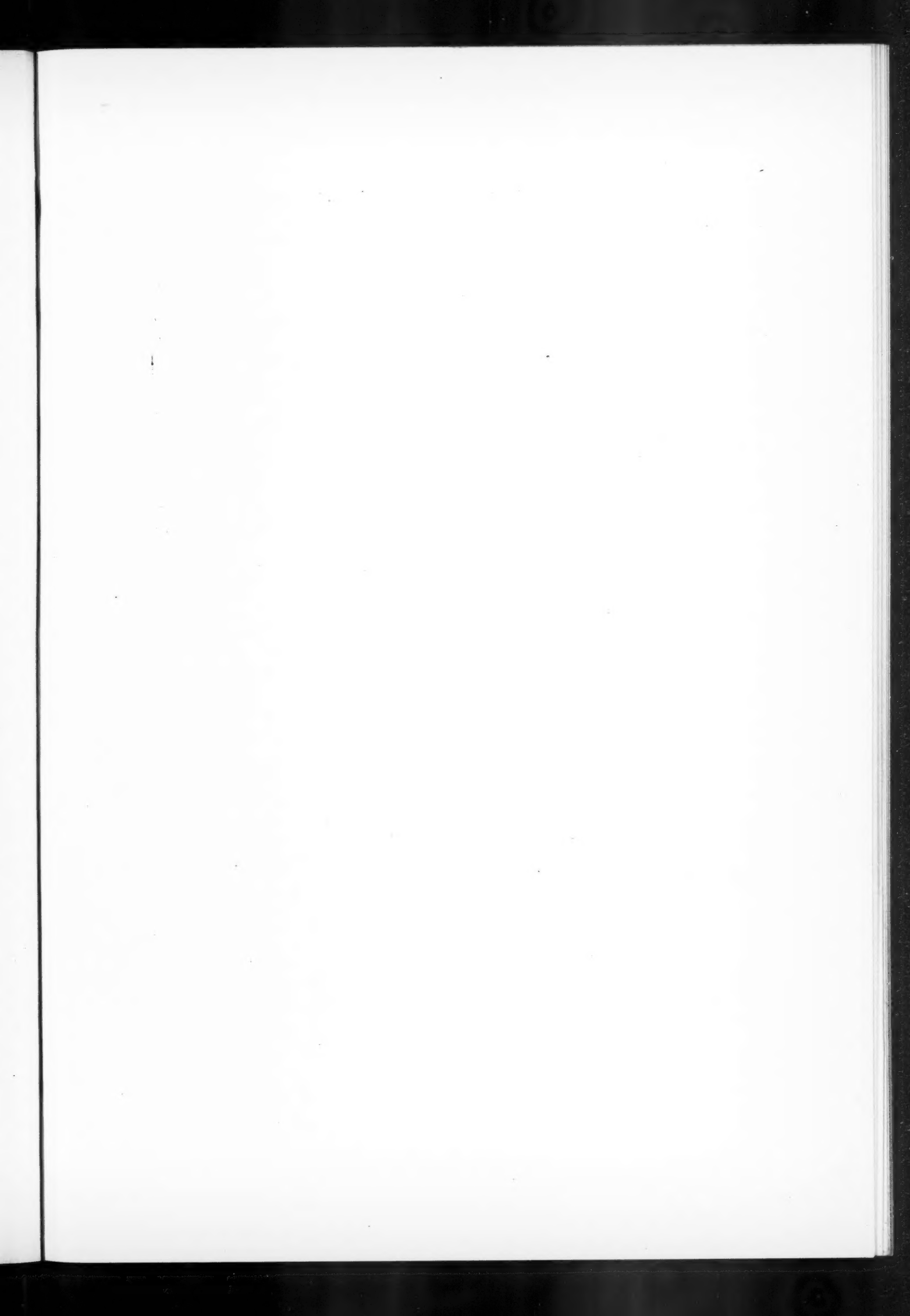
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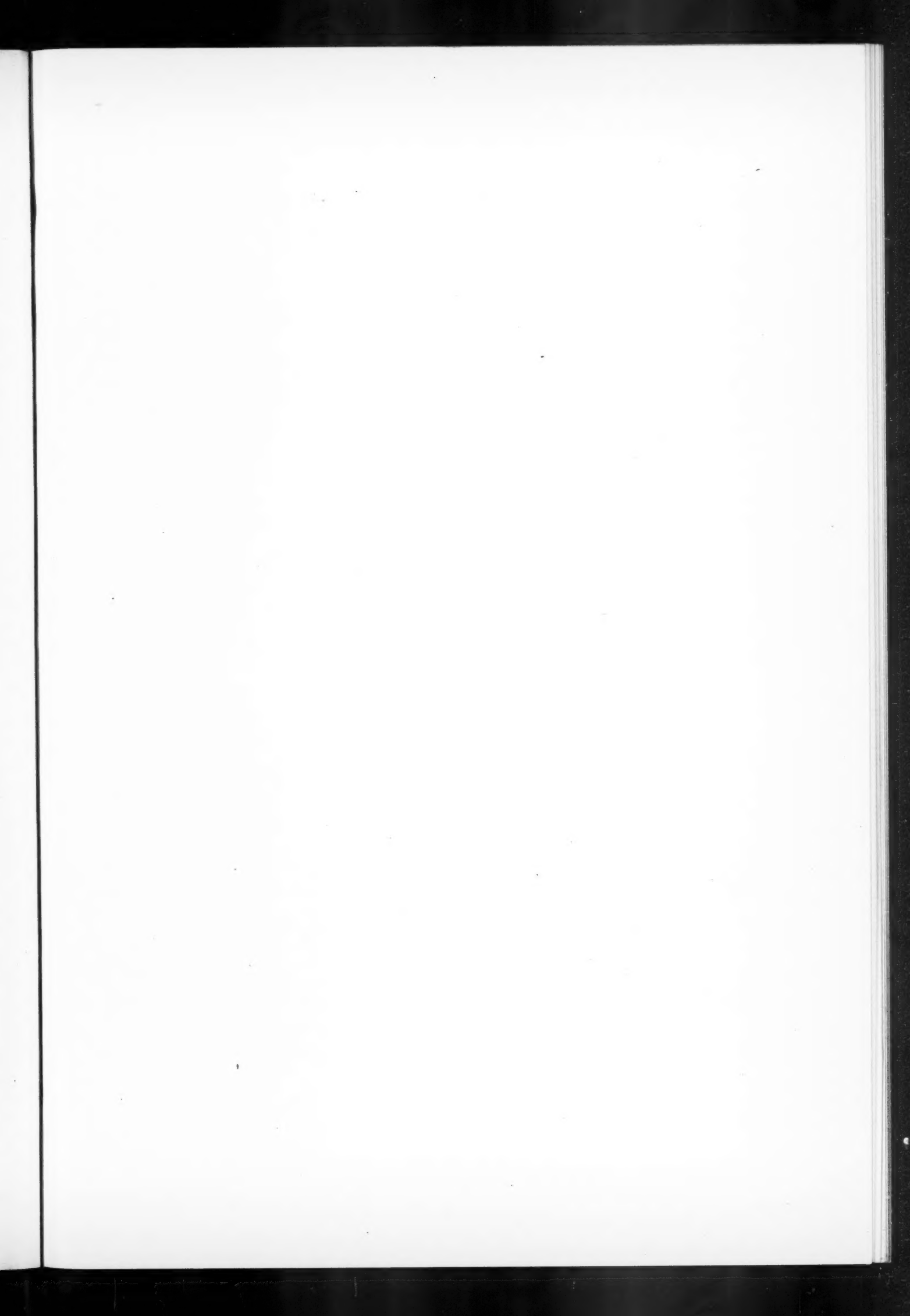
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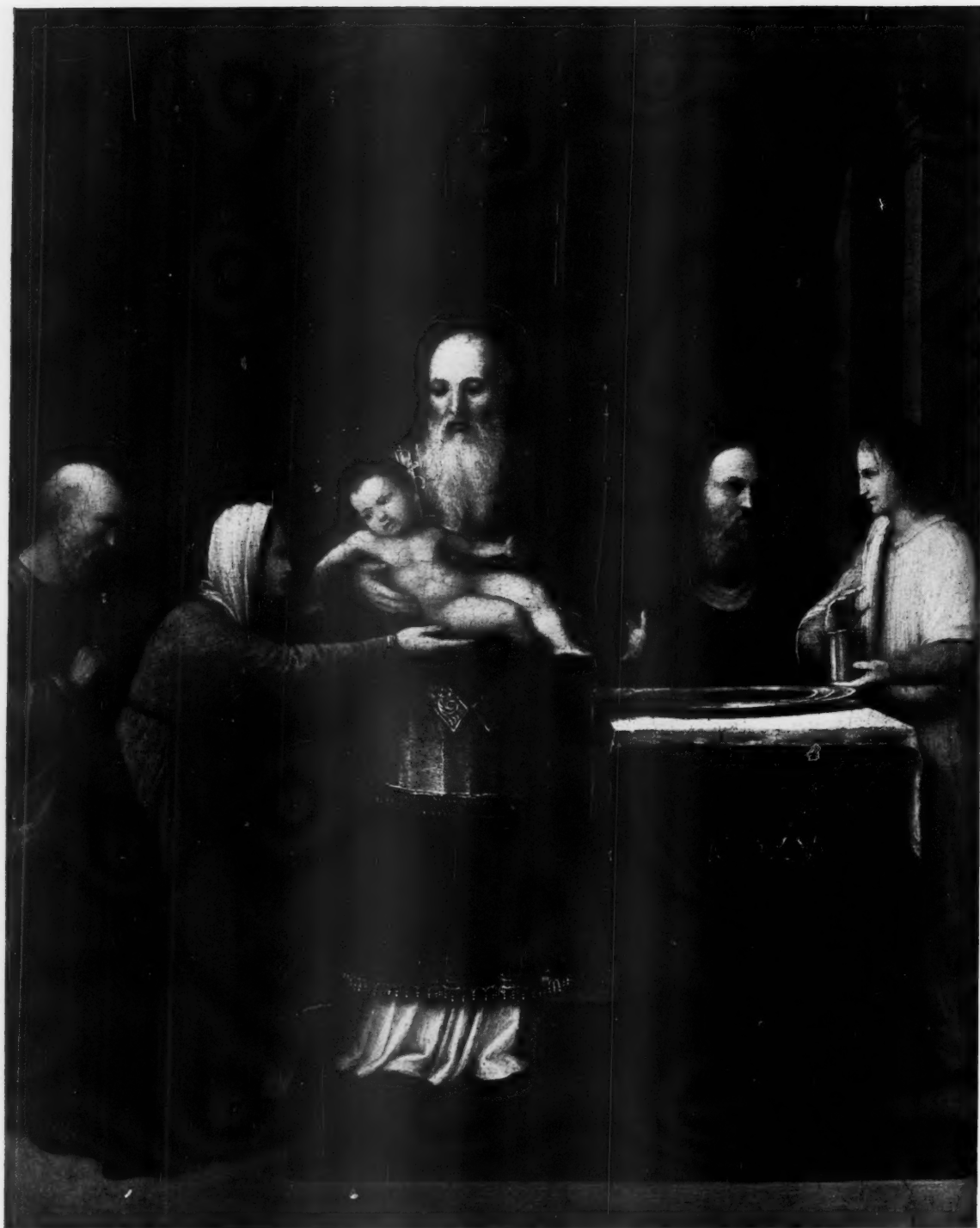
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FRA BARTOLOMMEO: PRESENTATION IN THE TEMPLE  
*Collection of Mr. John D. Levy, New York*



ART IN AMERICA *AND ELSEWHERE*  
AN ILLUSTRATED BI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE  
VOLUME XVI • NUMBER V • AUGUST 1928



A PAINTING BY FRA BARTOLOMMEO

BY IRÈNE VAVASOUR ELDER

*Assisi, Italy*

ALTHOUGH the little picture here illustrated, and now belonging to the collection of Mr. John D. Levy of New York, was known to me before its passage to America, it has been seen by but few other students and, so far as I know, has never before been reproduced. As a work of one of the most celebrated and important masters of the Florentine High-Renaissance, it is certainly not unworthy of publication, and I need, therefore, offer no excuse for this short note.

The picture represents—as may be seen from the reproduction—the “Presentation of the Child Jesus in the Temple.” Although dated MDXV, it shows no signature. There can, however, be no possible doubt as to its author. The types and figures, the draperies, the Renaissance architectural setting, all prove, quite clearly, that we have here an unmistakably genuine work of Baccio Oella Porta, better known to history under his religious name of Fra Bartolommeo.

The picture shows the master in a much more pleasing light than do most of his larger and more ambitious paintings, so many of which suffer from an only too obvious conscious effort at “scientific” arrange-

Copyright, 1928, by Frederic F. Sherman

ment and academic posing. The grouping of the figures, although it is still characteristic of the Frate, is here much freer and much more natural than is usually the case with him. The entire scene is, indeed, depicted in a quite simple and unaffected manner. The figures themselves are, again, all sincerely expressive of the sentiments connected with the picture's solemn subject. That of the grey-headed high-priest, Simeon, is full of grave dignity and tenderness; that of the Virgin Mary admirably expressive of her motherly love and care; that of St. Joseph marked by a touching humility and reverence; while the two attendants seem to be well aware of the unusual nature of the ceremony that is taking place.

As already stated, the picture bears, inscribed upon the front of the high-priest's altar, the date MDXV. It therefore belongs to its author's latest period and was executed only two years before his death. If it were not for the quite unquestionable genuineness of the date in question, one might easily place the painting some years earlier, so much does it show of the freshness of Bartolommeo's earlier manner.

Its small size (39 x 33 centimetres) might easily permit us to suppose that the panel once formed part of a predella. Its careful finish, however, together with the comparative prominence of its date, lead me rather to believe that it was executed by its author as a quite independent work.

Although rather heavily varnished—at least when it was last seen by me—the picture is in a very fine state of preservation. Despite its rather dark tonality, the colours themselves are clear and deep while the treatment of the lights and shades is soft and moderate and free from exaggerated contrasts. All in all we have here one of the most pleasing and attractive of the Florentine artist's smaller works.

## TWO ENGLISH ALABASTER STATUETTES IN ROME

BY ULRICH MIDDELDORF

*Florence, Italy*

NOWADAYS one must have some special reason for writing about individual English alabaster statuettes, for we have within the last two decades been so overwhelmed by them as to become a little weary.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, very few can lay claim to other than a purely archaeological significance, for the average production of a great workshop that limits itself to the slavish repetition of a few themes seldom presents much of real artistic merit. The first task of the investigator should be to uncover the artistic personalities which stood back of this production by sifting the prototypes, or at least those early works which stood nearest to them, from the great mass of subsequent material. To do this, however, would naturally involve the publication of an inventory of all the known pieces.

When I say the earliest works, I refer to that period subsequent to the first tentative efforts to work in alabaster which were still closely related to stone sculpture, and which was the really creative period when the great majority of representative types were evolved. This does not, of course, exclude the possibility that at later moments independent personalities bringing fresh vigor to the workshops inspired creations which have as great an artistic significance as those of the earlier periods.

The whole history of the alabaster workshops may most fittingly be compared with that of the Della Robbia atelier, with this difference that in the mediaeval ateliers the individual personality was more readily submerged than in the case of the Della Robbia workshop — particularly in its later stages.

The two statuettes of St. Peter and St. Paul in the chapel of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme in Rome, which I am publishing here,<sup>2</sup> largely owe their significance to the fact that they apparently belong among the very early creations, and differ from the average through their quality, the unusually accurate and careful workmanship, the charm-

<sup>1</sup> The best review of this literature, particularly of the meritorious publications of Mr. Nelson, is to be found by MacLagan, *Burlington Magazine*, XXXVI, 1920, 53 ff. I am indebted for the photographs to Mr. Luigi Fossati-Bellani, who had them specially made for me. My friend E. Meyer called my attention to the statuettes.

<sup>2</sup> Height with pedestal, 1.18 m., without pedestal, 1.15 m. I owe this information to Dr. Baumgart, Rome, who also looked over my material.



ing arrangement of the draperies, their comparatively normal proportions, and further through the fact that they are free figures without apparent architectural connection.

They have, however, all the distinguishing characteristics of the group to which they belong — particularly in the formation of the heads, with the large, summarily treated eyes which obviously were intended to be painted, and the curious carefully curled hair, so that there can be no question whatever regarding their origin. They stand in closest relationship to the beautiful reliefs in the South Kensington Museum, to which W. L. Hilburgh has assigned a relatively early date of origin<sup>3</sup> on costume historic grounds. There is, of course, no thought that they are by the same hand. Other related pieces are the relief of the Betrayal by Judas in the church at Hants,<sup>4</sup> and the Trinity owned by Mr. G. R. Harding.<sup>5</sup>

All these works are distinguished from the general run by a strongly French style trend — that of northern mid-fourteenth century France — which fits in well with the approximate date of about 1370 which is usually attributed to the early productions of this group.

The form of all the "*retables*" is French — take, for instance, the examples in the Cluny Museum, and the patterning of the background of the relief is familiar in France. If we compare the two statuettes in Rome with a work from the Ile de France — the charming marble Madonna in the Metropolitan Museum for instance<sup>5a</sup> — we find that the resemblance holds down to the smallest details in the treatment of the draperies — even to the curve at the edges, and in the treatment of the hair.

An alabaster group of the Coronation of the Virgin in the church at Whittleford seems, if one can trust the reproduction,<sup>6</sup> to have all the appearance of a French work, both as regards iconographic conception and style. This is not to be wondered at when we remember how strong French influence was at this period in western Europe. We are familiar with examples of miniature painting in which it is often difficult to distinguish between French and English work, and in architecture and monumental sculpture a similar situation exists.

<sup>3</sup> *Burlington Magazine*, XXXXVI, 1925, 307 ff.

<sup>4</sup> *Archaeological Journal*, LXXVI, 1919, 91, pl. VII, 1.

<sup>5</sup> *Archaeological Journal*, LXXI, 1914, 164, pl. 4.

<sup>5a</sup> This Madonna belongs to a large group of related pieces, which Dr. Voge has grouped around the Wooden Madonna of the Oppenheim Collection in the "Jahrbuch der Preussischen Kunstsammlungen."

<sup>6</sup> *Archaeological Journal*, LXXV, 1918, 311.



FIG. 1. MARBLE MADONNA. ILE DE FRANCE,  
MIDDLE OF FOURTEENTH CENTURY  
*Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York*



FIG. 2. SAINT PAUL



FIG. 3. SAINT PETER

*S. Croce in Gerusalemme, Rome*







We have, therefore, good grounds for the assumption that French art was the determining influence for the art of the alabaster workshops, and we have every right to recognize a strong French stylistic influence in their productions, particularly of the early period.

Nevertheless the English works have very definite characteristics which distinguish them from the French. Though they adopted the French forms, they breathe quite another spirit. Even in mediæval French statues we find something of the antique and southern joy in beautiful bodily forms and gestures — an almost profane and worldly feeling, whereas English and German art is harsher, more unworldly. The two apostles are portrayed with a primitive, almost Romanic sternness, immobile with stunted limbs — alive only through the severe, abstract and ornamental line of their garments. They are not portraits of individuals, but rather symbols of saints, members of a throng who, without consciousness of self, serve like the pillars of a temple to support the structure of their church.

The question presents itself as to whether important historical inferences might not be drawn from the whereabouts of these two statues. This is hardly the case, however, as the fact that English alabaster statuettes were sent to Italy is recognized.<sup>7</sup> We have, moreover, no more ground for assuming that they played any part in the development of Roman sculpture more than those other pieces of a like origin which strayed into Italy. Rome was then, more than at any other period, the meeting ground for foreigners — the great universal centre which attracted to itself men and things from all sides without absorbing them into its own individuality.

The presence in Rome of these English works of art brings once more to our attention the close relationship between art and daily life. We have, of late, been interested in tracing the history of style on its long pilgrimage and we recognize here a logical result of the distribution of English art objects along the paths of commerce, and in particular along those of maritime commerce. It is hardly an accident that the majority of these alabaster works which found their way abroad are to be found near the coast and in the neighbourhood of the great harbours.

<sup>7</sup> Papini, *L'Arte*, 1912, XIII, 202 ff.

## TWO UNPUBLISHED PAINTINGS BY AMBROGIO LORENZETTI

BY F. MASON PERKINS

*Assisi, Italy*

THE two panel-pictures here illustrated, although long ago recognized by me as authentic works of Ambrogio Lorenzetti, have so far remained virtually unknown to students and have never yet been reproduced.

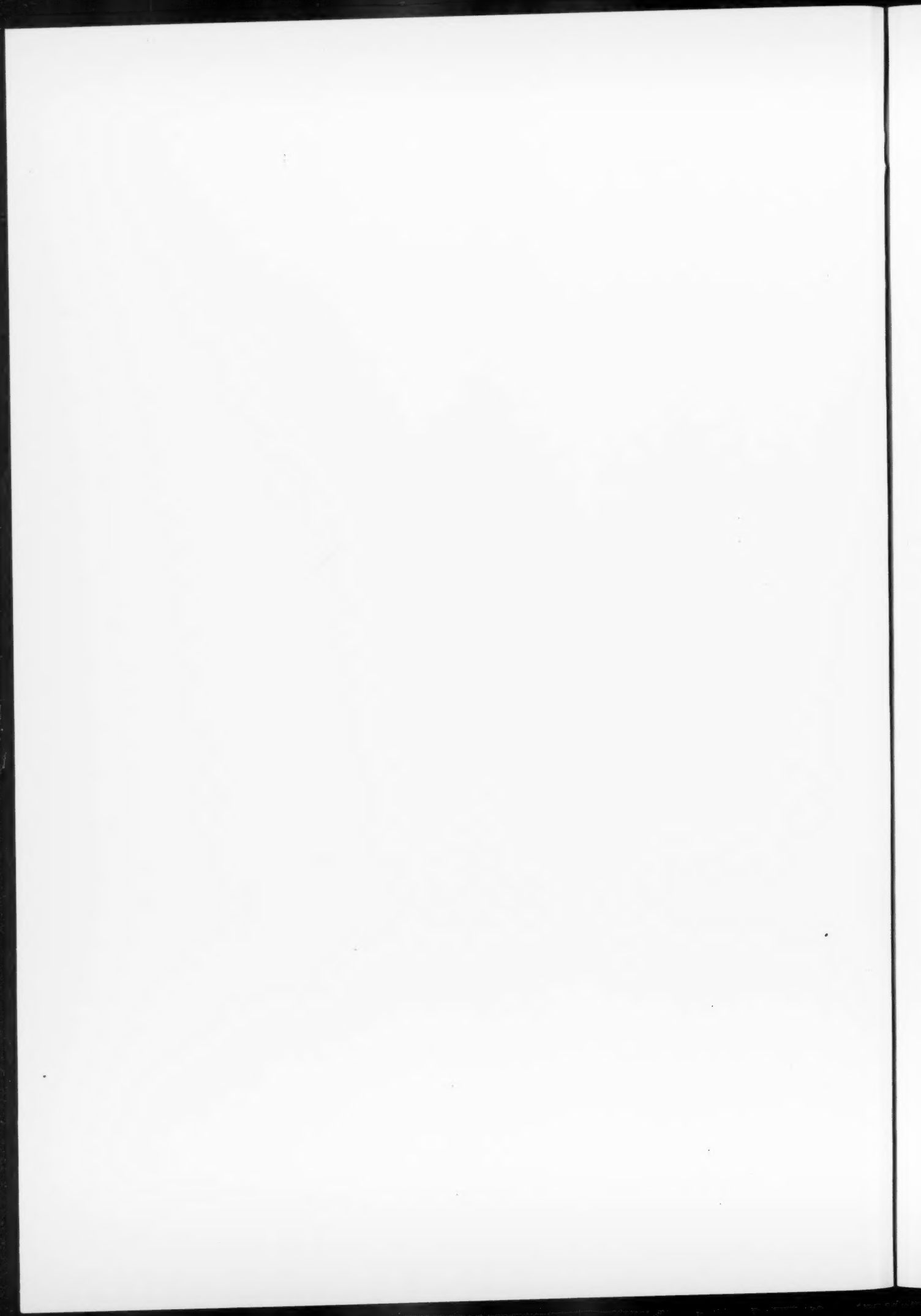
The smaller of the two paintings, which belongs to Mr. John R. Van Derlip of Minneapolis, is a so-called "Gothic" panel having for its main subject St. Catherine of Alexandria with her customary accompaniments of crown, wheel, and martyr's palm, and further containing, on the angular field within its gable, a diminutive representation of a Prophet holding a scroll. Both figures are painted on gold ground, the borders of which are relieved, as is the nimbus of the Saint, by carefully incised patterns of decorative design. In the conformation, as well as in the separate features, of her nobly gracious face and head, the Saint is unmistakably reflective of one of Ambrogio's most favoured and highly characteristic types—a type of singular dignity and beauty which is wholly and distinctly his own, and which recurs, with constant, albeit ever varied, frequency, throughout almost all the paintings of his middle and maturer periods. The hands, also, with their widely separated fingers, find their counterparts in many of his works. No less characteristic of the master, however, than these details of head and hands, is the figure as a whole, with its grandly simple draperies and design, its broad yet subtle modelling, and its monumental sense of existence and of weight. For all the limitations of its subject, and despite the fact that we have here what is, quite obviously, but a detached fragment of a once elaborate altar-piece, Mr. Van Derlip's panel is a remarkably attractive and typically representative example of its great author's art and one which forms a welcome and notable addition

NOTE — This short article had already been written (March, 1928), when I received from Mr. and Mrs. Blumenthal a copy of the truly magnificent Catalogue of their rich and varied collection recently compiled by Mdme. Stella Rubinstein-Bloch, in which I find (Vol. I, Plate XVIII) a full-page illustration of the picture of the "Madonna and Child" by Ambrogio Lorenzetti discussed by me. I hasten to acknowledge Mdme. Bloch's claims to priority in the reproduction of a picture which, none the less, has been known to me for many years. This question of priority will, in any case, hardly affect the usefulness, or otherwise, of my note, as Mr. and Mrs. Blumenthal's Catalogue, owing to the exceedingly limited number of its copies and the fact of its being printed solely for private circulation, will be likely to remain out of reach of the great majority of students.



AMBROGIO LORENZETTI: ST. CATHERINE OF ALEXANDRIA  
*Collection of Mr. John R. Van Derlip, Minneapolis, Minnesota*



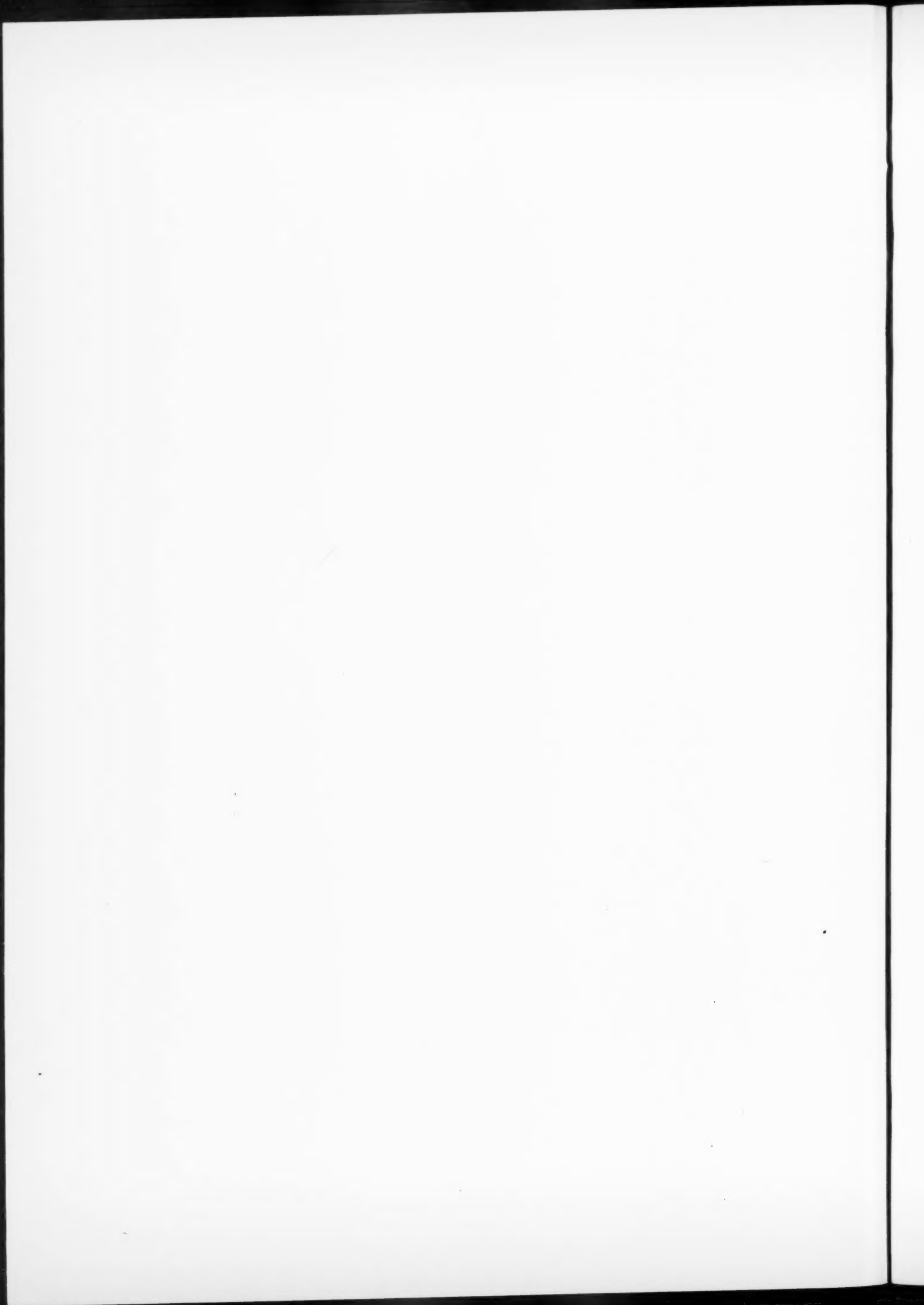






AMEROGIO LORENZETTI: MADONNA AND CHILD  
*Collection of Mr. and Mrs. George Blumenthal, Paris*







to the small group of genuine paintings by his hand at present in America.

Both in subject and in size, the second of our panels is a considerably more important work than the painting at Minneapolis. The property of Mr. and Mrs. George Blumenthal of New York, it has, for some years past, formed one of the chief adornments of their beautiful house at Paris, and represents the Virgin holding in her arms the infant Jesus, who is in the act of playing with a bird. As is so frequently the case with Ambrogio's versions of this subject of the Madonna and her Son, the Christ-Child is here conceived in a purely detached and naturalistic spirit. Instead of responding to His Mother's loving gaze, He is, for the moment, apparently quite oblivious of her presence, so complete is His childish absorption in His little feathered friend. In the shape and construction of His head He differs not a little from Ambrogio's usual type of Infant, but the drawing and moulding of the separate features in themselves, their combined vivacity of mien, and the handling of the different portions of the sturdy little body, are all completely characteristic of the master. The Virgin, while no less unmistakably Ambrogioesque in detail and in general design, differs, likewise, in certain respects, from the artist's habitual type of Madonna. Apart from its somewhat universal contour and proportions, her face is further characterized by a singularly striking cast of countenance and by an individuality of expression so peculiar and so haunting as to distinguish it very notably from the faces of Lorenzetti's other Virgins. Ambrogio, it is true, has given us various nobler and more ideally beautiful presentations of the Madonna, but few, if any, so arrestingly original and personal as this. As in Mr. Van Derlip's picture, the figures in this Paris panel are painted against a finely-wrought gold ground, while the panel itself is of the same "Gothic" shape. Once again we have before us what was, in all probability, but a portion of a polyptych, although, in this instance, the principal one.

Neither the Minneapolis nor the Paris panel is wholly exempt from past restorations and chromatic variations. The colours, for instance, of Mr. Van Derlip's picture have undergone an undeniable lowering of key, while its flesh-parts betray certain visible traces of retouching. Mr. and Mrs. Blumenthal's panel, on the other hand, while preserving virtually intact the greater portion of its flesh-parts and retaining, in good measure, its former colour-tones, has been less fortunate in regard to its gold background and certain portions of its draperies. Neither

painting, however, can be said to have suffered any essential alteration of its original character and both are precious and characteristic examples of differing phases of their author's maturer style.

## TWO UNPUBLISHED PICTURES BY BARTOLO DI FREDI

BY F. MASON PERKINS

*Assisi, Italy*

OF all the panel-paintings by Bartolo di Fredi that have come down to us, one of the most striking, and certainly one of the best remembered by the average tourist and student, is the large picture of the "Adoration of the Magi" now in the gallery of that master's native city of Siena (Sala II, No. 104. See Fig. 1). Brilliant and varied, albeit somewhat hard and enamel-like, in colour, and in an exceptionally satisfactory state of preservation, save for the wanton disfigurement, in times gone by, of a slight portion of the Virgin's face, this painting is typically representative in its technical handling, as in its peculiarities of form, features, and design, of both the qualities and the defects of that later phase of its author's art during which the idiosyncrasies already so clearly apparent in his earlier and more normal works begin to reveal a development marked by certain exaggerations later bordering, at moments, almost upon a gentle form of actual caricature. Few of those who have once seen the picture at Siena will be likely to forget the first impression made upon them by the remarkable and strongly-pronounced types of the kneeling Magi and their followers, by the singularly "oriental" forms and drawing of the horses and the camels as well as of certain portions of the colour-scheme, by the quaintly delightful procession of the Wise Men to and from Jerusalem (with its model of Siena's own Cathedral as one of its principal buildings) in the hilly background, and by the sincere and naïvely literal nature of the artist's conception and rendering of his subject as a whole. That Bartolo was here in possession of a theme the illustration

of which was more than usually to his liking, is clearly evident not only from the careful and detailed manner in which it has here been treated, but also from certain hitherto unsuspected indications that it was one which was frequently and willingly reverted to by him at different periods of his career. The painting at Siena is, as a matter of fact, by no means the only representation of its subject by Bartolo that has come down to us. Apart from two or more predella-pieces, to which I shall make no further reference in this present note, at least two other quite independent panel-pictures of the same theme have, for some years past, been known to me. Neither of these paintings, however, have ever been mentioned in any list of Bartolo's works, and both have so far remained, if not wholly unknown, at least unpublished.

Of the two pictures in question, by much the more important is a large panel in the collection of Mr. and Mrs. Albert Goodhart of New York (Fig. 2). As is at once apparent, this painting is, despite its actually very considerable dimensions, only a fragment of what must once have been a much more extensive whole. Fortunately, however, it has preserved to us the greater portion of the principal group of the subject represented — the figures, that is, of the Virgin, Child, and St. Joseph, those of the adoring Magi and three of their retainers, and those of three horses. It requires but a glance to show that we have here all that is left of a composition which, despite certain more or less noticeable differences in the features, actions, and grouping of its figures, must have been, in its general conception and design, strikingly similar to that of the painting at Siena, even to the presence of the Magi in the hilly background, a detail of which is still visible in the upper left-hand corner of Mr. and Mrs. Goodhart's panel. So far as it is possible to judge, however, the picture at New York seems to have been cast on broader lines — its composition seems to have been simpler and less crowded — and this simplicity seems to have extended, moreover, to the figures themselves, all of which display a largeness of form, drapery, and design, not to be found, at any rate to the same extent, in the painting at Siena. The heads and faces, also, in the fragmentary panel, are more normal and regular in character and are still virtually free from that over-accentuation of features and expression already so noticeable in those of its companion. All in all, the picture in the Goodhart collection, although likewise undoubtedly a work of Bartolo's maturity, seems nevertheless to be, if anything, anterior in date, by some little time, at least, to that in the Siene-  
nese gal-

lery, and still to belong to that period of its author's activity in which his style had not yet definitely taken on the exaggerations of its later development. Whether the New York picture was the initial version of the particular composition of which it is an example, or whether it was preceded by other experiments with the same general design, it is no longer possible to say, although there is fair reason for believing that the latter was in greater likelihood the case. That it was, in its complete original form, a considerably more imposing work—so far as size was concerned—than the painting at Siena, is evident, at once, from a comparison of actual dimensions. Whereas the New York panel—which, as has already been stated, is only a fragment of what must have been a very much larger whole—measures, in itself, almost 2 metres in height by something like 1.20 in breadth, that at Siena is, in its entirety, only 2.10 high by 1.75 in width. Given this evident preponderance in its original size, it is fairly safe to conclude that, even if Bartolo may have executed other large panel-pictures of the "Adoration" that have since been lost, the painting of which the Goodhart fragment formed a part was probably the largest and most ambitious altar-piece of its subject ever taken in hand by the master. Nor can it be said that its importance was due to size alone. Despite its greater breadth of handling and the more temperate use of ornamental detail which it reveals, it is, in reality, by no means inferior, in artistic quality and merit, to its Sienese counterpart. Save for a vertical crack of no significance, the panel is, so far as its surfaces and colours are concerned, in an admirable state of preservation, and one is, as in so many similar cases, left to wonder as to what concatenation of circumstances may have been responsible for the seemingly barbarous and uncalled-for mutilation of an altar-piece in such apparently perfect condition. We may congratulate ourselves, however, on the survival of what is left, as forming a truly important addition to the list of Bartolo's authentic works.<sup>1</sup>

The second of the two unpublished pictures, which form the subjects of this note, is at present in private possession at London (Fig. 3), and is, both in size and in artistic content, a much less pretentious work than either of the two paintings already mentioned. I shall leave to the reader to note for himself the many details in which it differs from its

<sup>1</sup> As I have already more than once had occasion to remark, the usually accepted lists of Bartolo's presumed works—as is also the case in regard to Paolo in Giovanni Fei and other of Siena's minor artists—are in need of drastic revision, as containing more than a few paintings that are certainly not due to this master's own hand.





FIG. 2. BARTOLO DI FREDI: ADORATION OF THE MAGI  
*Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Albert Goodhart, New York*



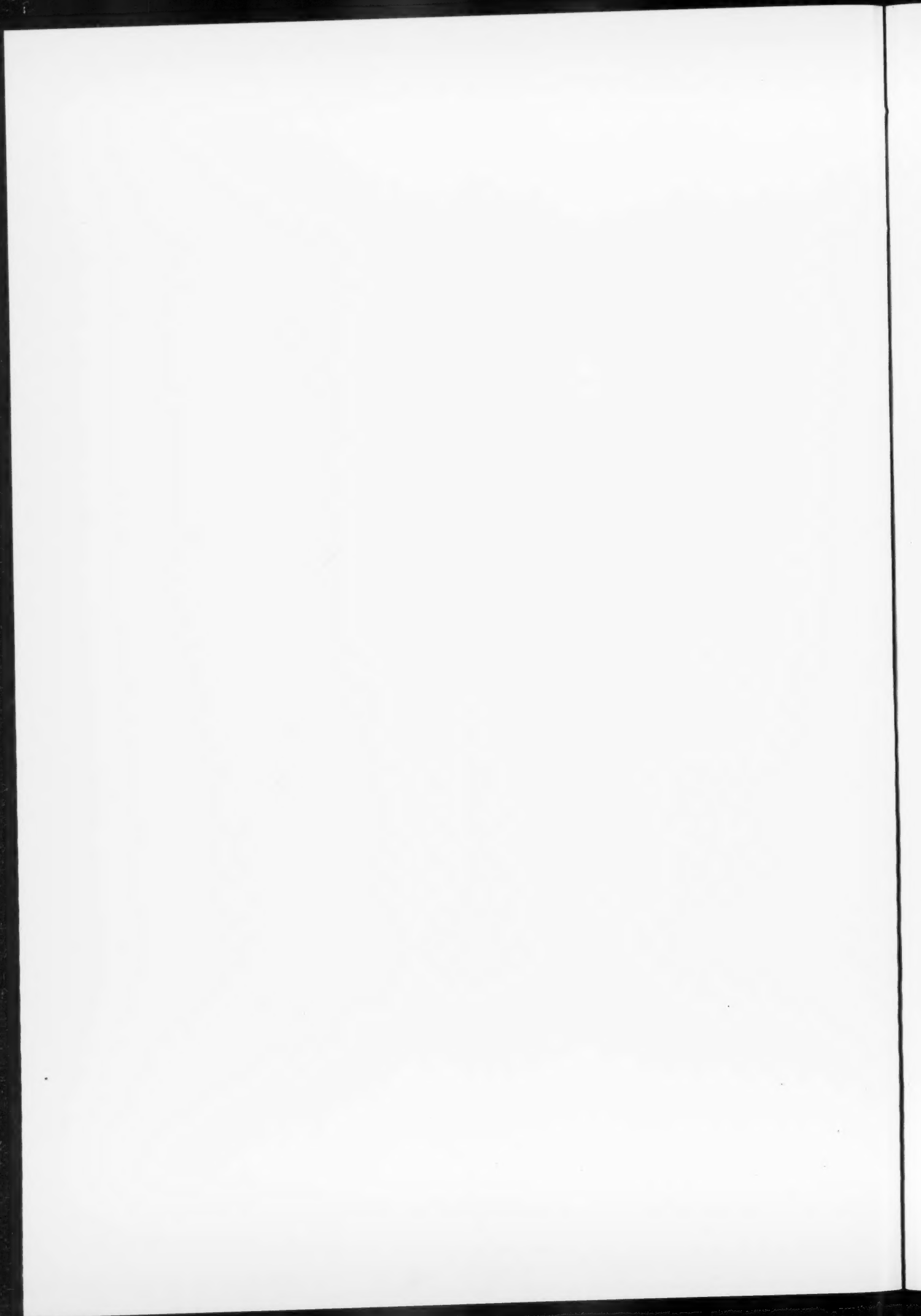


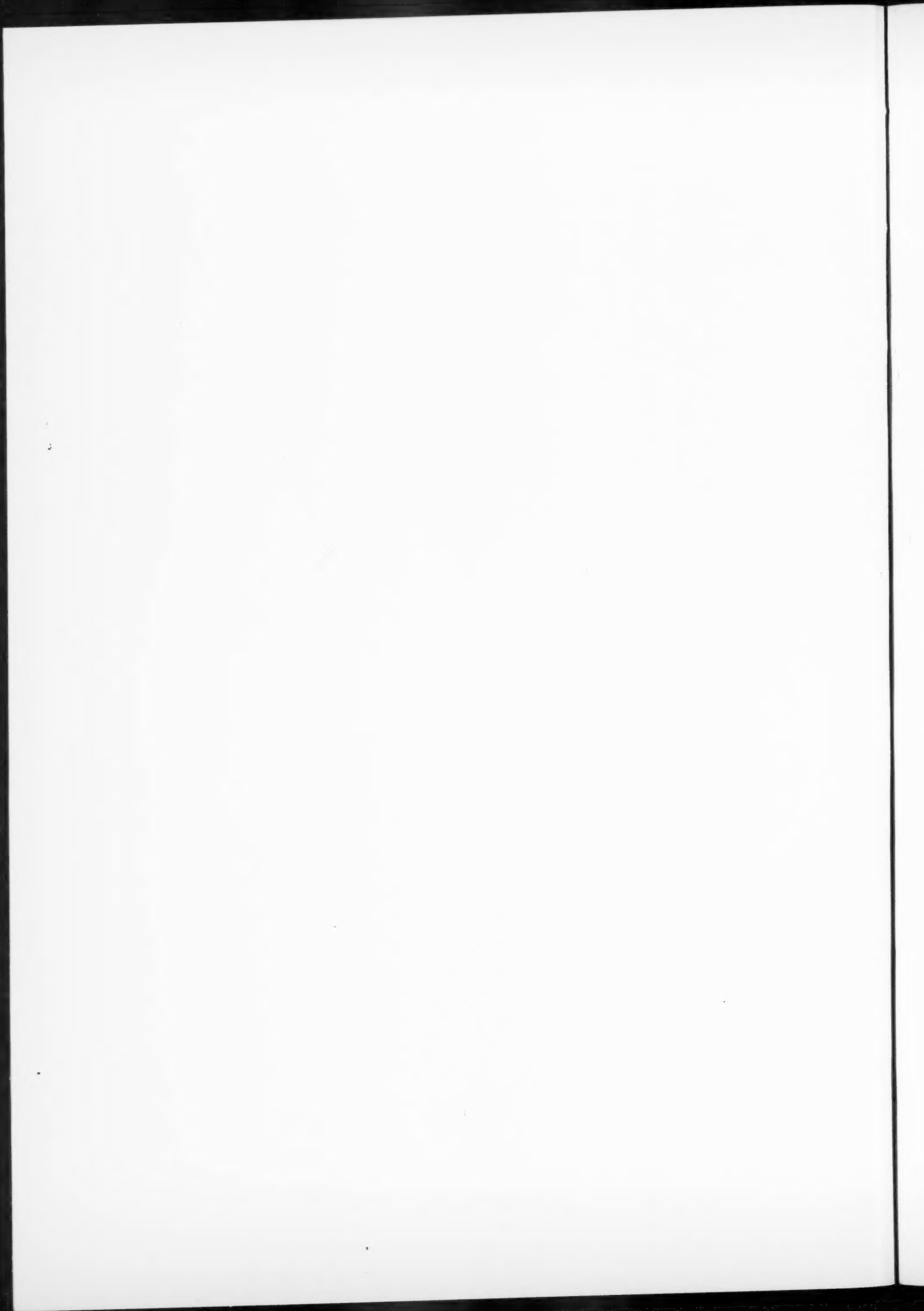


FIG. 1. BARTOLO DI FREDI: ADORATION OF THE MAGI  
*Siena, Gallery*



FIG. 3. BARTOLO DI FREDI: ADORATION OF THE MAGI  
*Private Collection, London*





more important sister pieces. Fundamentally, however, the composition is virtually the same as in those panels, although the motive of the procession in the background is here reduced to a minimum, together with a notable alteration in the aspect of the landscape itself. Once again we are clearly in the presence of a production of the artist's riper years — one which I am inclined to consider as, in all probability, later than either of the two foregoing examples. The exaggerations of Bartolo's later manner here take on — especially in the figures and expressions of the two dogs, the horses, and the truly marvelous camels — so distinctly humourous a touch as to leave but little doubt in our minds that it could not have been wholly unconscious or unintentional on the painter's part. Be this as it may, however, the picture certainly displays, in a marked degree, all those ingenuous traits and gaily pleasing decorative qualities which are seldom absent even from Bartolo's latest works, and which go far to make up for their frequent artistic weaknesses and defects. As is the case with Mr. and Mrs. Goodhart's picture, the panel at London is in an excellent state of preservation. In comparison with the former work it is, however, quite diminutive in size, measuring only 46 centimetres in height, by 33 in width.

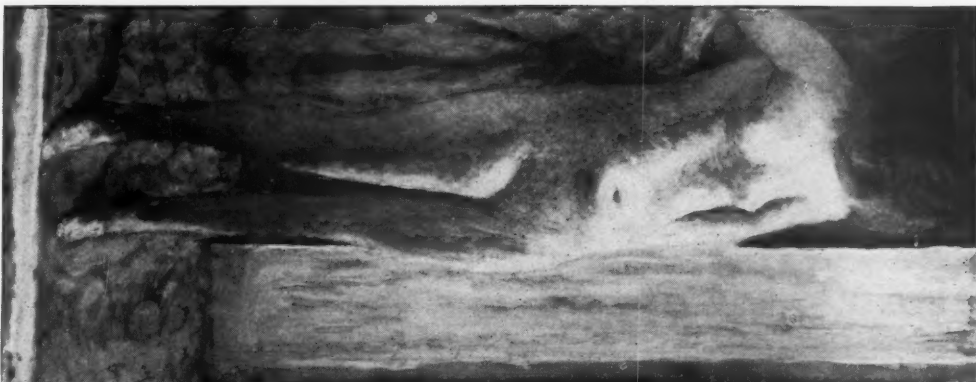
## PIERRE BONNARD

BY WALTER GUTMAN

*New York City*

THE charm of Pierre Bonnard's painting, if one were to epitomize it, might be described by the word fragrance. There have been other artists of refined sensibilities, Watteau, for example, whose art was yet too forceful to be described by this word. Mr. Bonnard has a delicacy of spirit as well as of perception, and indeed it is the sweetness of this perhaps more than the accuracy of the other which constitutes his gift. I do not mean to imply that he is emasculate, but that he is considerate not only in the application of his paint, but in the interpretation of his subject. He does not seem, as most noteworthy painters, to rule it. Instead he coöperates. His friends say of him that if you were to see him, for example, paint something in a still-life you did not like, he would, more than likely, consider it and rub it out. I do not know whether anyone has actually proven the theory, yet the humbleness which fostered it must be considered unusual among artists. Perhaps some will say, unworthy. An artist is an expert; he should be humble before his medium but not his patron. If the patron does not like it, let him go elsewhere. Whatever may be the truth, there can be no question that the tenderness with which he interprets his women, the gentleness of his flowers and the simplicity of his landscapes is the result of this spirit. Renoir's women are vigorous and likeable creatures, Cezanne's landscapes have sparkle and breadth, Bonnard's have gentility. Because of this one can compare his nudes better with the bronze gilt ornaments of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and, for me, especially with those of the Thibet, than with any other product of art. They have the same perfection of proportions, the same preciseness of modelling, the same fragrant sensuality, the same delicacy of spirit. And to Bonnard's is added the good humour of our age.

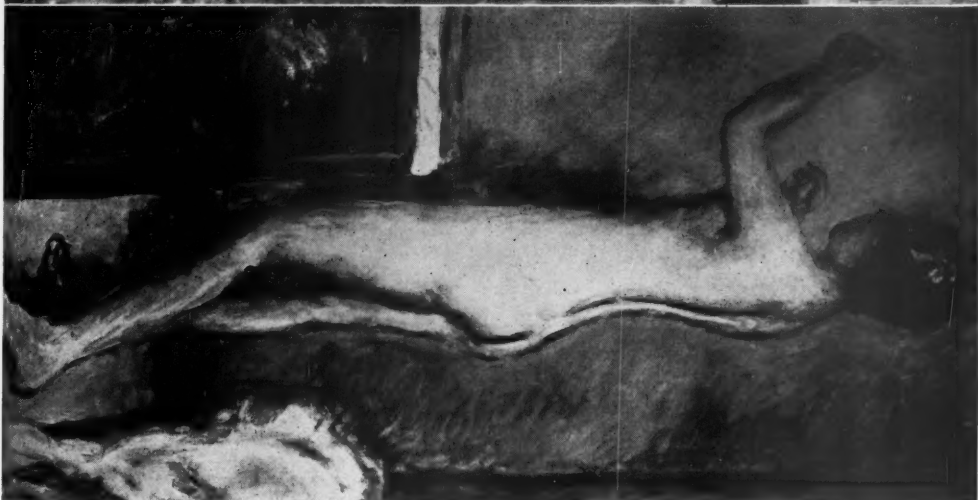
The last, perhaps, is even better illustrated by his still-lives. I think particularly of one called "Field Flowers." It shows some daisies and poppies in an ordinary glass pitcher. They are placed on a walnut table, back of which are shelves of books, these in disarray. To one side, set against the wall, is a checker board of blue and ecru squares. The wall is lavender. The picture in its homeliness and casual arrangement reminds one of Dutch works, but in the brightness of tones, and in what



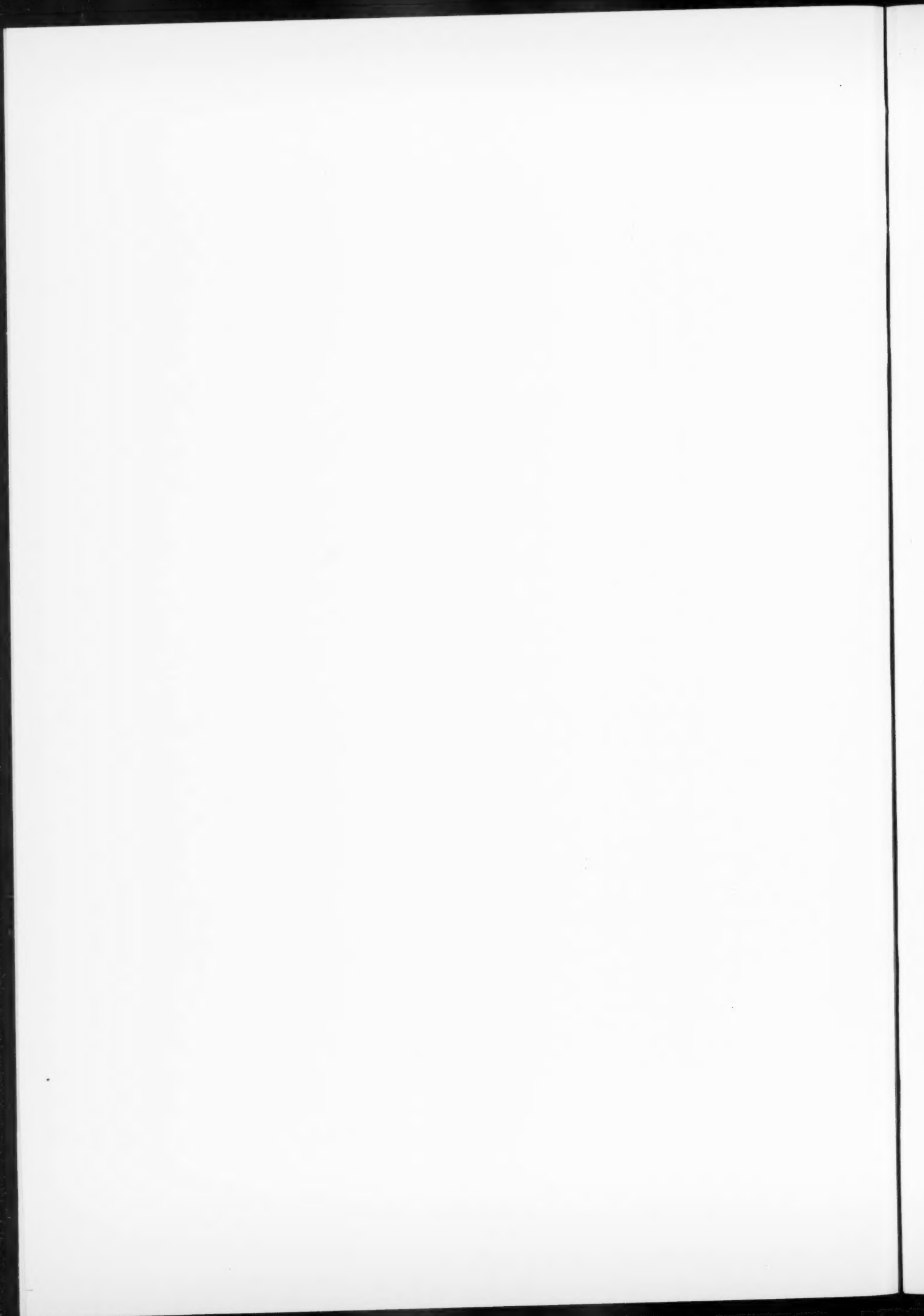
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PAINTINGS BY PIERRE BONNARD



Nude



might be called the gastronomic taste of selection it is French. Altogether it is Bonnard. Perhaps one might say that he is the first bourgeois painter of France. I know that Chardin painted middle class scenes. So did the Nain brothers, Cezanne and many others. But all of them read a seriousness into the arrangement, and the color and form of the subjects which removed most of the savor of locality. With Bonnard this is not so. One enjoys the walnut table, one sort of pats it, it has been in the family so long. And the pitcher, it is very wonderful that we can buy such serviceable things which reflect such light, so cheaply. Or in the picture called "The Window," one enjoys the pea-green painting on the window frame, the sun and air, the iron railing, which is certainly ugly enough but which keeps one from falling out, the red roofs of the town, and the other pleasures of people who, not fearing poverty, nevertheless know all the enjoyments there are in what they spend. Perhaps the paintings most filled with lusciousness, not of the earth's colors but of its juices, are three painted at Vernon. Two are landscapes, and one shows a river with a tug in it. Whoever has been in Normandy will, I think, be swept away by the vigour of the rank grass, the yellow and white of the flowers — brown-eyed susans, daisies, masses of Queen Anne's lace, then the sky, purple with rain blown from the Channel, the rich hills, thick with pasture, the river seeping between its banks of grass, the herds, and, represented by the tug, commerce.

As will be seen by the above, Bonnard's appeal is one of association, the delicacy and fragrance of his women, the richness of fields and utensils. Seldom can one detect artfulness, either of the impressionists or of the contemporaries. Yet this is because of no isolation. He was a student at Julien's where he knew Vuillard, Serusier and Denis. By the first he was considerably influenced, adopting his olive and black coloring and his somewhat actualistic subjects and arrangements. Then he became interested in applied art, making furniture, screens and posters. At this time he was influenced by Lautrec. Though a formative period it gave happy results, as the "Girl in Checkered Dress" will show. Here we see a woman dressed in a red checkered gingham waist, seated and holding a white and brown poodle in her lap. In back of her is a curtain, mottled brown and red, with a bit of gray wall showing on one side. There is a table placed before the woman, covered with a pinkish cloth. The woman herself is ruddy and brown haired. The simple, strong colors make the painting effective, but in addition to the linear pattern, and especially the arabesque of the woman's shoulder and arm and of



the edge of the table, make this delight constant. From this time came a steady lightening of the palette, an adoption, that is, of the principal Impressionist discoveries, though without any attempt to systematize. In fact less and less as he continues is one excited by the system in his art. He is content to use the obvious tricks of painting — drawing and perspective which give the illusion of nature, color which reënforces the idea of space given by line and plane; a composition which animates the surface of the canvas but which does not choke it. There is none of the Puritanism of Matisse — the utmost economy possible in order not to be vulgar, no exploitation of the various systems of form and arrangement, no intellectual play with color and form as with Picasso, no attempt at an abstract decoration within a limited space as with Braque. Consequently one is never aroused to the grand and purified emotions of Cezanne — spellbound by the magic with which the sensuality of form by itself is forced upon one, nor as before Picasso, by the glorious perfection of his harmonies and the intelligence with which he has made and restrained his choice. Bonnard's motive and message is the love of a particular object. He expresses this love in his tentative approach. If he paints a woman one is not impressed with her form by firm masses of color. A spatter of purple, a sprinkle of yellow, some spots of green and the lithe figure emerges. The Impressionist method was much the same, yet before an Impressionist painting one feels an interest in the phenomena of light and color rather than the subject. With Bonnard the motivation is the subdued ecstasy which he seems to feel before it. He considers the appeals of the different beauties. He tries to put them down in the proportions in which they affect him, and the proportions in which the subject might wish them to exist, so as to give the onlooker a just understanding of the qualities of the subject and of his emotion. So subtly is a picture brought out that it is almost impossible to demonstrate the mechanics. For example in the painting called "La Palme" — a view of a town seen from an elevation through the branches of palms with, at the bottom, a woman who perhaps symbolizes the relation — one is dazzled by the apparent variety and haphazard relation of the colors and forms, yet a little observation will show that the tones are few and that the forms, while infinite, balance. Conversely, at other times the composition is so simple that it appears childish. As, for example, in some of his harbor scenes, where the composition is simply a blue to purple sky, a slightly grayer sea, a deep orange sand, and slightly modelled boats of white, blue, green and black. Yet so



exactly are the colors apportioned, and in this case so fine are the individual tones, that the accusation of naivete hardly occurs to one except as an after thought.

It must be confessed that the enjoyment of this subtlety is often of the gentleness of its spirit rather than its result. Too often it has made the color insignificant, as if by an accident it had been coated with oil. Sometimes the spirit seems a bit cloying as in his bowls of fruit, which seem polished as the fruit in the stands, too long. And, as we have said, his composition has occasionally too much of the apparent formlessness of nature. But where the subject warrants his method, as with his women, or where it conquers it, as in his Normandy landscapes, he is one of the most persistently enjoyable of contemporary painters.

## THE ART OF ROBERT VONNOH

BY ELIOT CLARK

*New York City*

IT is seldom that a distinctive portrait painter has at the same time been a master of landscape. Portraiture is preëminently the study of character as revealed in form, and in consequence demands a deep psychological understanding combined with the ability to record the outward appearance. The portrait painter as a specialist hardly enters the neighboring domain of figure painting, which requires the relation and unification of differing forms and colors. Since the great English masters portraiture has become a specialty. In a word, the portrait painter is seldom a designer in any creative or complex sense. His imagery is very limited.

In considering the work of Robert Vonnoh we must remark at once his great versatility. He has not followed one branch of the art to the exclusion of the other, nor has he been a portrait painter at one time of his career and a landscape painter at another. During his entire artistic activity for over fifty years he has devoted himself where his

interest has led him and has not allowed a specialty to circumscribe his art or limit his development.

The artistic problems which Vonnoh has essayed indicate a very unusual and sensitive comprehension, involving the knowledge of form and line with the appreciation of light and color; considering the solid as represented in the absolute dimensions on one plane, and the purely suggestive illusion of nature's infinite detail resolved into the simplifications of pictorial form.

In the portrait and figure pictures of Twachtman, the character is entirely subordinated to the envelopment of light and the colorful ensemble. The sitter as a personality is secondary. Whistler used the decorative accessory to give an aesthetical importance to his picture, which as representative portraiture it would not otherwise have. In his Carlyle, for instance, he used the compositional scheme of his earlier picture of his mother, so appropriate as an expression of the resignation and calm of age, but entirely incompatible with the rugged and gruff character of Carlyle. Weir, likewise, used spatial arrangement and tonal harmony to give a decorative flair to his portraits. Duveneck was a pure portraitist. The landscapes and harbor views of his later career, under the influence of impressionism, have nothing of the command or significance of the early master. The gifted Theodore Robinson showed unusual versatility. Trained as a figure painter, his later adventures in impressionism allowed him to introduce the figure as an unaffected part of the visual picture. But Robinson was not interested in portraiture for itself, and his preoccupation with the problems of envelopment, drew him entirely away from the study of physiognomy.

Among landscape painters few have had the technical mastery or the constructive understanding to render the figure convincingly. Landscape painting is a purely suggestive art, and generalization is almost incompatible with more exact representation.

Robert Vonnoh has the rare ability not of combining the two but seeing each subject for itself. As a portrait painter he has not sacrificed likeness, and his brush has responded to his knowing understanding of character. In some examples he places his subject in the "milieu" of everyday environment, or a casual pose is happily arrested as in the very intimate characterization of Daniel Chester French. But Vonnoh is also conscious of the function of an official portrait, and his presentments of distinguished sitters have a formal elegance without sacrificing personality.

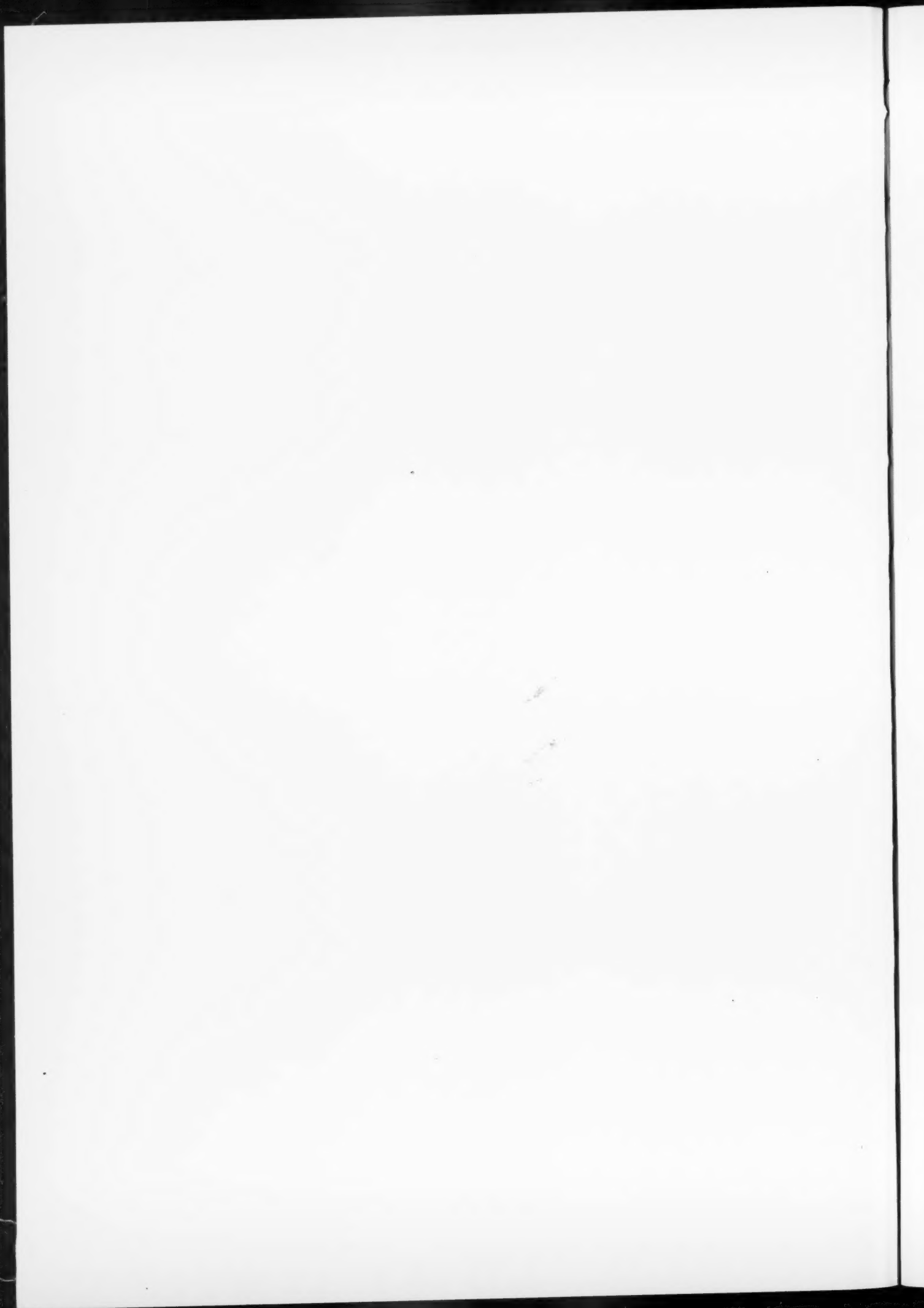


ROBERT VONNOH: PORTRAIT OF JOHN S. CONVERSE  
Painted in 1883



ROBERT VONNOH: PORTRAIT OF DR. S. WEIR MITCHELL  
*Pennsylvania Academy Fine Arts, Philadelphia*







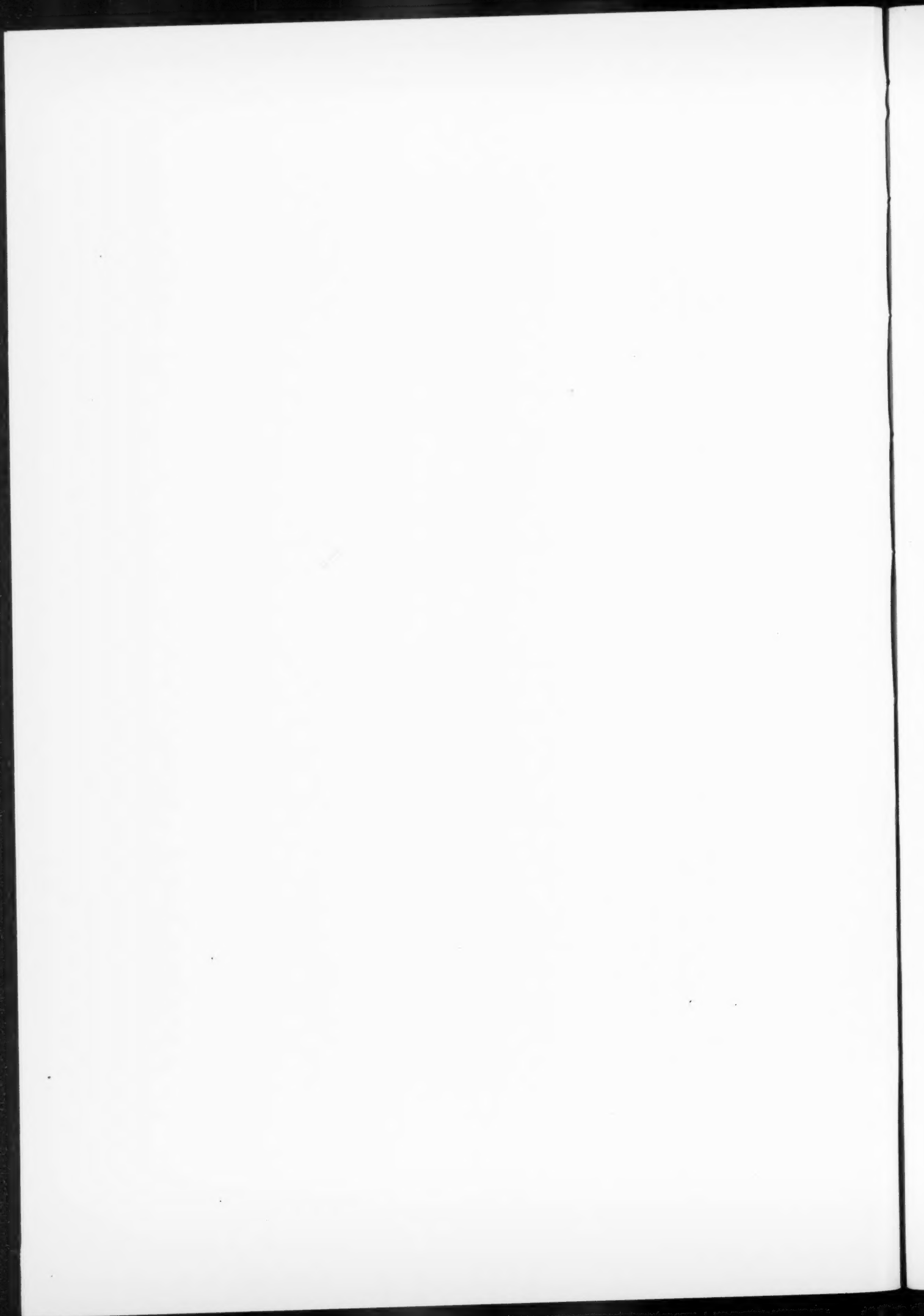
ROBERT VONNOH: POPPIES



ROBERT VONNOH: NOVEMBER







The portrait of Dr. F. Weir Mitchell is one of the masterpieces of American portraiture, in which the subject is not sacrificed to an aesthetical conceit or made to fit into the limitations of the painter's ability. The artistic conception grows out of the subject and is not imposed upon it. It is not painted to reveal the personality of the artist but of his sitter. It is precisely for this reason that it has true distinction. This is far from saying that it is merely the chance replica of visual appearance; nor is it to infer that it is an unexpressive photograph of the subject. The highest comprehension implies a certain impersonality, that intuitive understanding brought about when subject and object unite.

During his second sojourn in France from 1887 to 1891 Vonnoh devoted much time to the study of the figure out of doors. In this we find his double accomplishment happily combined. Not making the human interest his principal theme, to which the landscape is subordinated or conventionally arranged as background, his knowledge of light and color and his mastery of his medium have allowed him to see the picture in its entirety. Without the traditional scheme of focal concentration by means of chiaroscuro, the painter has rendered the natural appearance without sacrificing the balance of pictorial design. In many examples the human interest is merely a minor element in the landscape, but in several of Vonnoh's most important pictures the figure is the dominant theme.

In his "History of Modern Painting" Richard Muther, the distinguished German critic, writes: "Others attempted the most hazardous schemes of colour, and often excite the impression that their pictures have not been painted with the brush at all. In this respect that bold colourist Robert William Vonnoh reached the extreme limit at the Munich Exhibition of 1892. His gleaming and flaming picture of a field of poppies, where a girl was playing, while the glowing July sun glanced over it, is less like an oil picture than a relief in oils. The unmixed red has been directly pressed on to the canvas from the tube in broad masses, and stood flickering against the blue air, and the bluish-green leaves were placed besides them by the same direct method, white lights being attained by judiciously managed fragments of blank canvas. Never yet was war so boldly declared against all the conventional usages of the studio; never yet were such barbaric means employed to attain an astounding effect of light."

Robert Vonnoh must be considered historically one of the pioneer

impressionists of America. When the low tones of the Barbizon school were in the ascendent, this innovator was experimenting in pure color. A scientific turn of mind and a receptive nature made Vonnoh doubly susceptible to the new discoveries of light and air. He was probably the first American painter to grasp the significance of the scientific color relations of the impressionists. At a time when Twachtman was still absorbed in tonal grays Vonnoh was applying paint almost directly from the tube in a system of vibratory complimentary relations.

The pictures of this early period are as fresh and brilliant as when first painted, and despite the great changes since that time are still youthful and exuberant. For Vonnoh combined the enthusiasm and gusto of improvisation, with splendid reserve and mastery of his materials. It is this direct attack which is accountable for the perfect preservation of his pictures. There is no fumbling, little under painting and no dark color to show through.

Vonnoh has always had a great respect for the materials of the painter's craft, and a thorough understanding of them. There is, however, no subtle secret in his method, and Vonnoh makes no secret of it. He prepares his own canvas. This is done without sizing the linen with glue. It is the glue that makes canvas friable, and is also accountable for the fact that the oil in which the color is ground stays on the surface. Over the raw linen the artist applies a pure white, thinned with turpentine. This application is repeated several times until the ground is sufficiently non-absorbent. It is a surface particularly sympathetic to brilliant color and virile painting.

Several of Vonnoh's canvases are a consummation of the expression of the period in which they were painted. I refer particularly to some of the smaller pictures painted about 1890, studies made directly from nature, probably at one painting. Lacking significant content, certainly not profound, yet having that spontaneity and exhilaration, that joyous ring, which belongs so precisely to the period. Modernism has become involved and introspective since that time. Affecting the child-like and primitive, painting has grown old and tremendously self-conscious.

Vonnoh's most representative landscape of the early period is the "November" in the Philadelphia Academy. More consciously composed and deliberately painted, lacking something of the abandon and charm of improvisation of the smaller studies, it remains one of his

most complete creations. Within the limitations of the painters intention his art can progress no further. In fact, perfection implies certain imposed limitations. It is a particularly felicitous creation, both in design and color, the subject and the method of presenting it being happily united. The painter has not derived strength by means of contrast but by relation or the harmonization of varying hues brought together under a single aspect of lighting.

Vonnoh represents the historical progression which springs from the impressionism of Monet rather than the realism which derives from Courbet and Manet. The first is concerned with color and the illusion of light, and is technically expressed by means of broken color. The second is preoccupied with planes and the relation of form produced by flat brushwork.

With Vonnoh color is likened to the harmonization of sound when many instruments are combined to produce a single tone. Divided or broken color is likewise unified at a distance by means of the eye. This vibration of color is the unique contribution of Impressionism as a technical process.

Of the group of distinguished American impressionists Vonnoh is perhaps less sensitive to the purely aesthetical expression and the problems of design introduced by the new leven of oriental art and the influence of Whistler. Twachtman was more truly intuitive. With less knowledge and more limited range his art is more personally expressive. Weir was more contemplative. He transposes natural appearance into a subtlety harmonized unity. Theodore Robinson has winsome and captivating clairvoyance. Hassam is more decorative and radiates a purely aesthetical joyousness.

Vonnoh is more sensitive to the visual image and is in consequence more realistic. His temperament is expressed in subtle and delicate variations rather than violent and dramatic contrasts. His mood is pensive and serene and his palate is attuned to the tranquil. He reflects the illusive and symphonic effects of nature, when colors are vibrant and transcendent and the atmospheric veil softens natures harshness as by a poet's fancy.

Born at Hartford, Conn., Robert Vonnoh's early training began in Boston in the impressionable years of adolescence. Losing his father as a little boy, he showed unusual initiative and will when against his mother's wishes he resolved to learn a craft. At the age of fourteen he entered a lithographic house and was set to work cleaning presses

and learning the mechanical side of the job. In 1875 he entered the evening classes of the Massachusetts Normal Art School, then but recently opened under the direction of Walter Smith, and in '79 became one of the instructors of that school.

In 1881 Vonnoh set sail for Paris, for the old *Semaria* in which he went steerage was a combination sailing and steam vessel. Already an accomplished draughtsman he entered the Julian Academy, as a free lance, and worked for seven months under Boulanger and Lefevre.

Returning to the states in 1883 Vonnoh began his career as a professional portrait painter, being awarded a gold medal in Boston for his portrait of John S. Converse which had previously attracted considerable attention at the Salon. His work out of doors, and perhaps also study in pastels, led him to the consideration of light and color. Impressionism was in the air. It was like letting the sunlight into a sombre room. The second trip to France in '87 brought the painter in direct contact with the work of the Impressionists. This was the decisive period of Vonnoh's art as a colorist. His own nature seemed to be perfectly attuned to the new conception.

In 1891 Vonnoh became associated with the Philadelphia Academy as instructor in painting and several of our most distinguished artists worked under his direction at this time. His influence was not personal. As a teacher Vonnoh has stressed the essential elements of the craft rather than that personal conception which should be the contribution of each individual.

An outstanding figure in the art world of his time Vonnoh has established an enduring reputation and received many honors and awards. The Sesquicentennial Exhibition in Philadelphia had a personal significance for Robert Vonnoh for he was represented in the great Centennial which marked the beginning of a new era in American Art.